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ABSTRACT

The five chapters in this handbook, intended for parents of children entering kindergarten for the first time, offer suggestions about how parents can help their child get ready for school and make starting kindergarten a successful and happy event. Chapter 1 describes when learning begins and offers tips for helping children who are starting school and for handling opening day jitters. Chapter 2 focuses on knowing more about 4- and 5-year-old children and offers suggestions for monitoring children's health, happiness, anger, and safety. Chapter 3 is devoted to parents' learning about the child's teacher, the contents of the school program, school laws, and the school's methods of testing children. Chapter 4 discusses before- and after-school care and offers guidelines for examining the types of care available, finding care, and determining whether the child care offered fits the parents' needs. Chapter 5 explains the parents' role in their child's education and suggests activities to help the child succeed in and out of school. An appendix lists detailing actions involved in good parenting and skills for parents to develop in dealing constructively with their or their child's anger. (KDFB)

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A Handbook for Parents of Children Entering School for the First Time

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STATE OF MARYLAND
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IN REPLY REFER TO

Dear Parents:

Congratulations! Your child is beginning a new school experience that will help to shape his or her entire life. I am sure that, as your child's first teacher, you share the excitement and the responsibilities of this new beginning. You play a critical role in your child's experience as a life long learner.

Your Child Goes To School will give you suggestions about how to make starting kindergarten a successful, happy event. It tells you how children learn and how you can help them get ready for school. It gives you ideas for making everyday activities stimulating learning experiences for your child.

In Maryland, we recognize that every child is unique and entitled to the best education possible. If we all work together, we can make sure that all of our children are getting the attention and the learning experiences they need to become happy and productive citizens.

We know that children do best when they have the support and attention of their parents. Your child's teacher and staff at your school will do all they can to help your child experience success in as many ways as possible. Your active support of this effort will go far in helping your child – and your child's school – succeed.

Please make plans now to visit the school often and to keep close contact with the teachers so that you can work together in doing what is best for your child. Also, ask the teachers and staff how you can help, either as a volunteer during the school day, as a member of the school's parent-teacher organization, or in some other way.

I wish you well as you and your family begin this new adventure.

Sincerely,

Parris N. Glendening

Parris N. Glendening
Governor

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Fourth Printing, 1996 Linda Zang, Grant Director

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Your child goes to school

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Spring, 1996

1 A New Beginning

When Does Learning Begin?

Your child has been learning to learn since birth. You have been the most important grown-up in her life. Your home has been her most important school. You've helped her explore the world. You've taught her how to speak and how to listen. You've given the warmth and security she needs to feel safe and happy. And you've helped her feel that she is a good and special person. But now your child is ready for her "formal" school experience to begin.

Just as you were excited when your baby took his first step, you can now be excited that your child is entering school. Prekindergarten and kindergarten are very important to your child's development. The goals of these programs are to help your child gain self-confidence, learn how to get along well with others, and develop important skills that will help him deal with the complicated world around him. No longer does learning come only from the teacher. Sometimes children work together in groups and often they choose their own activities based on their interests and curiosity.

Are There Tips for Starting School?

You can help your preschooler get ready for school in many ways. Habits developed at home will often help at school, for example:

- Setting a regular clean-up time for putting things away develops organization.
- Making your child responsible for a few household chores teaches reliability.
- Following set schedules for regular meals, daily baths, storytime, and bedtime establishes consistency.
- Letting your child dress herself, including tying shoes, fastening buckles, and buttoning or zipping clothes, encourages responsibility.

Other activities to help your child be successful are found on pages 27 and 28.

How Do I Handle Opening Day Jitters?

The first day of school is a big event, but it does not have to be a bad event for you or your child. Be positive and look forward to the first day of school! Be loving and understanding. Keep telling your child that everything will be okay. Letting go can be hard, but don't let your doubts or nervousness stop your child's excitement.

As school time nears, your child may be full of questions. Here are some typical worries she may have and some possible answers for you:

Will the other kids like me?
You will make new friends at school, just as you have friends here at home.

Who's going to help me?
Your teacher will help you whenever you need it. All you have to do is ask.

Will the teacher like me?
Your teacher likes children and will be glad to see you every day.

What happens if I need to go to the bathroom?
You can tell your teacher quietly, and your teacher will tell you where to go.

Will I have to take a nap?
Sometimes you may have to rest for awhile by being still.

How many kids will be in my class?
There may be a lot of children in your class, but each one of you will have a special place to sit and a special place to put your things.

How long will I have to stay?
Your answer depends on whether your child is going to a half-day or full-day program. Use a favorite activity such as lunch or "Sesame Street" to help your child understand the time.

Will I learn to read today?
Not today because reading takes a long time. However, your teacher will read to you every day, and there will be lots of books for you to enjoy.

Usually those first day fears clear up quickly once the routine of going to kindergarten has been established and your child realizes that school is a good place to be and that it can be fun. However, if your child's fears continue, make sure to discuss them with her teacher.

Knowing My Child

2

About Fours

The busiest, noisiest, and most active child in the classroom or at home is the four-year-old. He wants to be around lots of kids his own age and seems to always be using his large muscles to run, jump, climb, and push.

Sometimes the four-year-old is hard to understand. One minute she is bragging and the next she is feeling insecure. Four-year-olds will sometimes be a headache, but never a bore.

Your child needs to be praised for trying and encouraged to explore his world. However, he must follow rules made up for his safety. He needs to be independent, but he must have firm limits.

Your four-year-old is going to test what she can do with you. You will need to teach her the difference between what is right and wrong. You should make sure she follows school rules, but you must take time to listen to her side of the story. Keep in mind that most four-year-olds don't mean to be uncooperative, but unfortunately being bossy, rude, and whining are typical of this age.

The following guidelines can help you help your child be a happy, successful four-year-old.

- Help your child understand when someone has hurt him.
- Build in some daily quiet time for your child.
- Answer his questions simply, directly, and honestly.
- Show genuine interest, patience, and understanding.
- Establish routines, but don't be afraid to change them for a spur-of-the-moment activity.
- Offer firsthand experiences in touching, tasting, seeing, hearing, and smelling.
- Teach your child to spell his first and last name and help him memorize his address and phone number.
- Teach your child how to do simple jobs.

Your child is growing and changing. It can be helpful to have an idea of what most four-year-olds can do. The following information should be used only as a general guide to how your child behaves.

Always remember each child is different!

Physical

- Tumbles, jumps, hops, walks on tip toes
- Throws and catches a ball
- Holds and uses a pencil
- Draws circles and squares
- Cuts and pastes with help
- Dresses and undresses with help
- Decides whether to use right or left hand (don't try to change your child's decision)

Intellectual

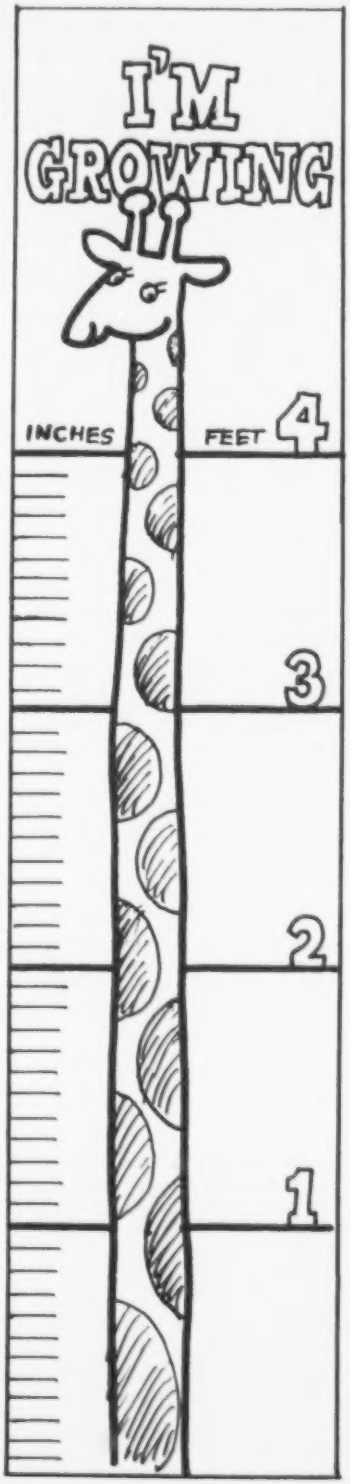
- Speaks in almost complete sentences
- Is moving beyond "baby talk"
- Enjoys being read to
- Wants to have her own way
- Calls friends "names" and may use "bad words"
- Recognizes at least four colors
- Counts to at least ten

Emotional

- Usually pleasant but changes from happy to unhappy for no apparent reason
- Occasionally becomes upset, "shows off," or is "smart alecky"
- Wants a lot of attention and acts up to get it
- Hits or teases playmates
- Tattles, brags, and sometimes "lies"
- Has a vivid imagination and never-ending curiosity

Social/Play

- Enjoys other children; may have a "best" friend
- Plays well with two or three other children
- Is willing to take turns
- Likes to make believe and dress up
- Spends time making things
- Wants to help adults with chores



About Fives

Your happy four-year-old has grown up to be a calmer and less excitable five-year-old. Five-year-olds are friendly, talkative, and affectionate toward adults. They are eager to please you, but they sense they are growing up and want to be thought of as "big boys" and "big girls".

Five-year-olds are aware that written words mean something. They may recognize a few letters and words and pretend to read and write. They love to have stories read or told to them. They especially like those with lots of action, movement, and repetition.

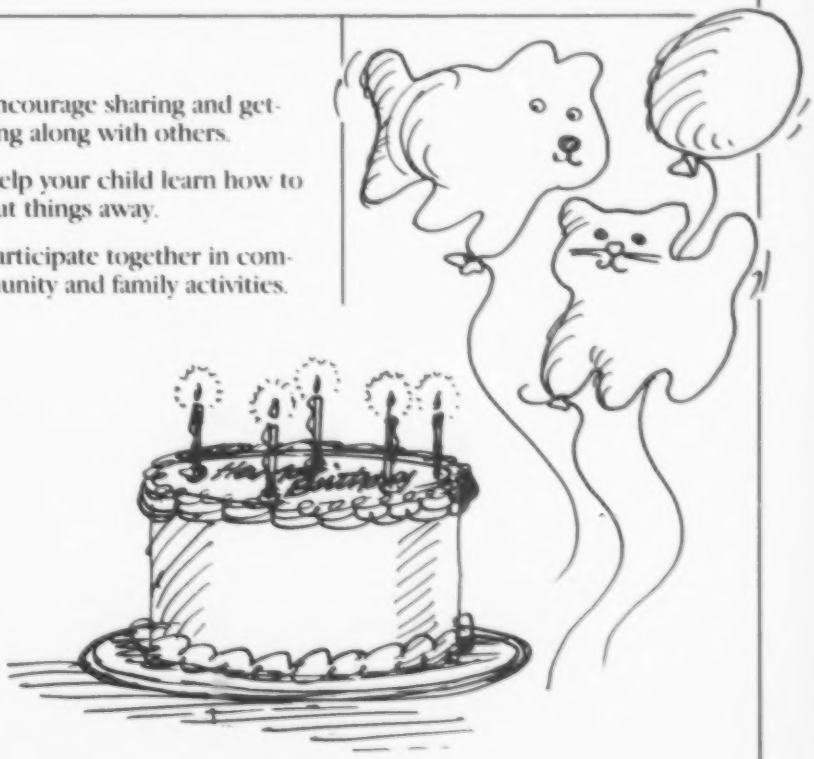
Your five-year-old is eager to try out his independence, but you need to set limits. After a full day exploring, you must let him calm down and share his experiences with you. Remember, an ordinary activity for you is an enormous learning experience for a five-year-old.

Your five-year-old needs routines, including one for getting ready for school. Starting the day calm and relaxed at home with a healthy breakfast will make your child less likely to get into trouble at school. Choosing clothes and fixing sandwiches or snacks the night before can help to make mornings less pressured.

Your five-year-old needs help in learning right from wrong. Her drive to try out new things is strong, and she needs equally strong limits set by you. She may copy what her classmates do without thinking. It's your job to let her know how you expect her to act.

You can use the following guidelines to help your child be a happy, successful five-year-old.

- Assure and reassure your five-year-old that he is loved and is special.
- Answer all your child's "why" questions as best you can in simple words that he can understand.
- Provide plenty of activity and equipment for exercising large muscles.
- Give your child the chance to make small but important decisions, such as making choices.
- Encourage sharing and getting along with others.
- Help your child learn how to put things away.
- Participate together in community and family activities.



The following information identifies some typical five-year-old behavior. As at all other ages, five-year-olds develop at different rates.

Always remember that each child is different!

Physical

- Moves more smoothly; has better balance
- Skates, runs on tip toes, jumps rope, skips, catches a ball
- Jumps forward on one foot
- Draws a complete person (body, arms, legs, feet, clothes), a triangle
- Prints first name
- Dresses self; may tie shoes
- Complains of frequent stomachaches, usually caused by fear or stress
- Occasionally wets the bed at night

Intellectual

- Asks good questions
- Continues to talk constantly
- Holds conversations with others
- Tells simple stories, nursery rhymes, and "silly" jokes
- Connects two or more sentences
- Matches pictures
- Shows interest in the outside world
- Counts to at least 20

Emotional

- "Acts out" or "acts up" less
- Thinks things through
- Likes challenges
- Takes responsibility for actions
- Says "I can"; is eager to please
- Thinks teacher "knows more" than parent

Social/Play

- Plays house and dress up
- Plays with five or six children in a group
- Takes as much time as needed (even days) to finish a project
- Uses scissors and colored paper
- Follows simple game rules
- Uses sophisticated building blocks
- Likes to experiment with different body movements
- Participates in organized sports activities

Healthy Children

Your child is entering school for the first time. You must help her stay healthy in order to learn. Your family doctor or your child's pediatrician should perform a physical examination, including a hearing and vision test.

You'll want to ask the doctor questions such as:

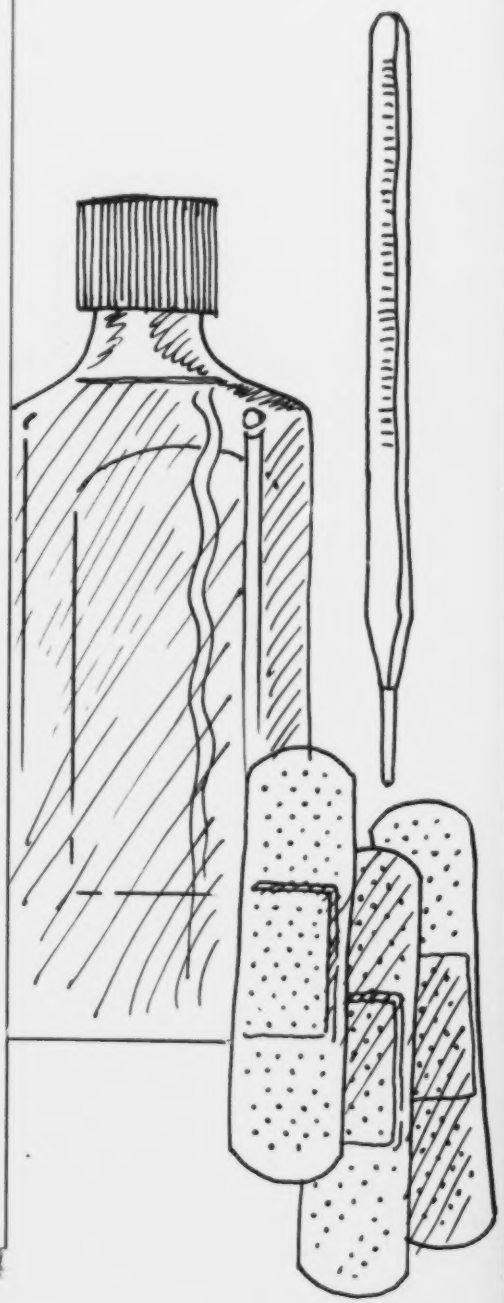
- How is my child growing?
- Does my child have any special diet needs?
- What illnesses are common?
- What is the schedule for my child's immunizations ("shots") for school?

If your child has special health needs (for example, allergies, chronic illness, disabilities), tell his teacher and the school nurse. This will help them take the best possible care of him. Most schools will ask for a written note from your doctor if your child must take medicine or treatments.

Remember to take your child's health records, including doctor's reports and immunization records, to school.

When to Keep My Child at Home

- Sore throat; unable to swallow
- Chills
- Fever of 100°F or more with oral thermometer
- Headache plus one other symptom
- Earache
- Rash
- Flushed face, especially cheeks
- Runny nose with thick white or greenish mucous
- Severe cough
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Red, itchy eyes



Recommended Schedule of Childhood Immunizations
Maryland 1996

	AGE OF CHILD						
	BIRTH OR 1 MONTH	2 MONTHS	4 MONTHS	6 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	15 MONTHS	SCHOOL ENTRY
DIPHTHERIA TETANUS PERTUSSIS (DTP)		X	X	X	X		X
POLIO		X	X	X			X
HEPATITIS B	X*	X			X		
H. INFLUENZAE TYPE B (HIB)		X	X	X**		X	
MEASLES MUMPS RUBELLA (MMR)					X****		X***

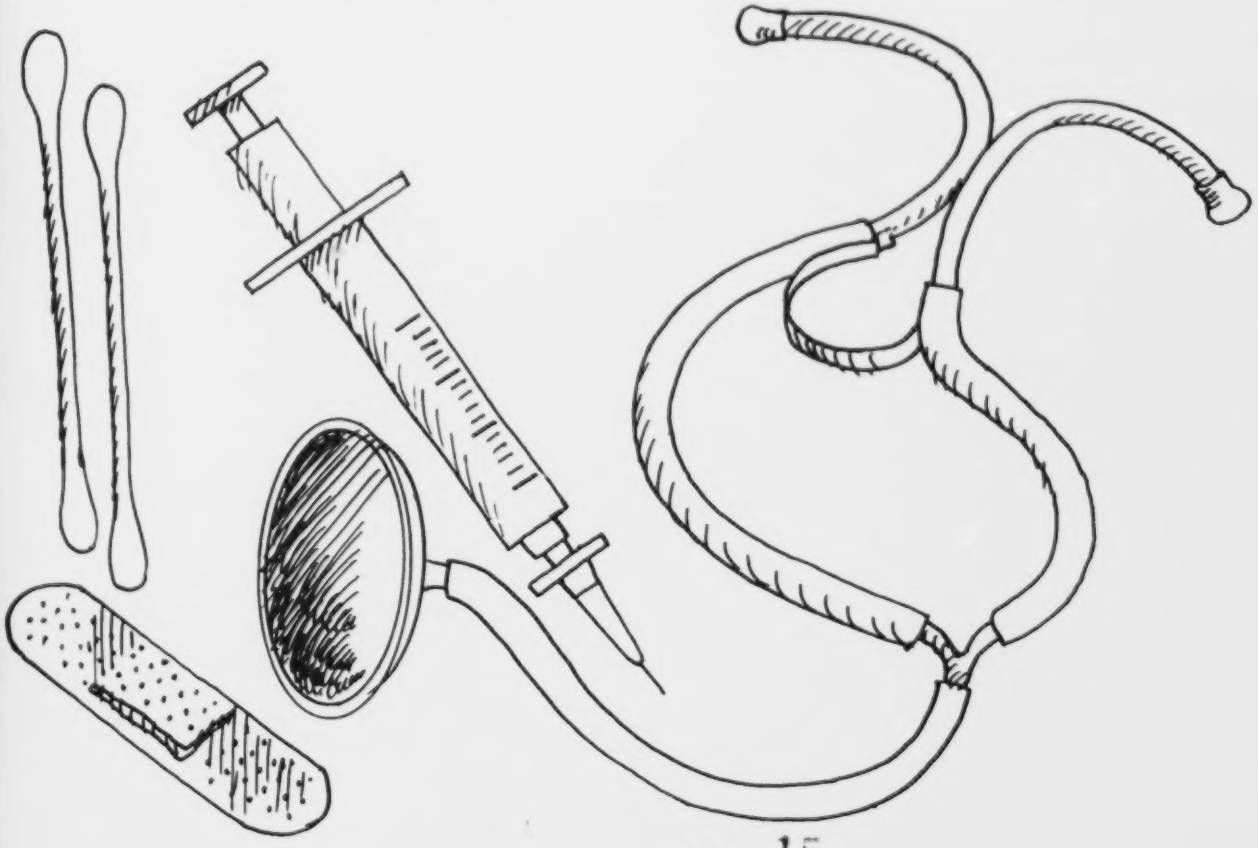
Please note that some health care providers may use a slightly different schedule.

* - If the first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine is given at 2 months, then give the second dose at 3-4 months of age.

** - This dose of Hib may not be necessary, depending on the manufacturer; consult your physician.

*** - A second dose of Measles vaccine is required for school entry, although it is usually administered in combination with mumps and rubella vaccines (MMR).

**** - Chicken pox vaccine has recently been approved for children. Consult with your health care provider.



School Rules for Childhood Illnesses

Disease	*Incubation**	*Isolation*
Chickenpox Pimples, blisters, and/or crusts in different stages	2-3 wks.	Excluded from school until lesions are scabbed over
German Measles (Rubella) Mild rash with enlarged glands on back of neck	2-3 wks.	Permitted to return to school 5 days after onset of rash
Measles (Rubeola) Cough, runny eyes and nose, high fever, and extensive rash occurring first on the face	10-14 days	Permitted to return to school 5 days after disappearance of rash
Mumps Fever, swelling, and tenderness of one or more of the salivary glands below and in front of ears	12-26 days	Permitted to return to school 14 days after onset of swelling
Ringworm of scalp Areas of scaly patches of baldness; may begin as small pimples	10-14 days	Excluded from school until under treatment by a physician
Scarlet Fever or (Scarletina) Sore throat, high fever, rash on body and extremities	1-7 days	Excluded until released by physician to return to school
Head Lice (Pediculosis) Tiny insect lays eggs (nits) in hair; multiply fast — cause itching and white "specks" seen in hair	until treated	Excluded based on local school return policy
Fifth Disease "Slapped cheek" appearance with red, raised area on face — may have sore rash elsewhere	4-14 days	Excluded until seen and diagnosed by a physician
Scabies Tiny mite burrows under skin causing streaked areas and intense itching	until treated	Excluded until diagnosed and treated
Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis) Contagious condition, redness and watering of eyes, pus may be present	Acute	Student is excluded until the eye is clear or until released by a physician to return to school

**Incubation is the time between when your child is exposed to a germ and when your child gets sick from that germ.*

Nutritional, Sleep, and Dental Needs

Following your doctor's advice, it is your job to help your child stay healthy in order to learn. In addition to medical care, your child has special nutritional, sleep, and dental needs in order to be successful in school.

It's up to you to give your child nutritional foods. She is at an ideal age to learn good eating habits and is eager to try out new foods. Keep healthy snacks on hand because your four-year-old may often be hungry between meals. She possibly will even prefer four small meals daily. Mealtimes should be a pleasant family gathering. Your child will always remember family culture and traditions learned during meals.

Your five-year-old needs ten to twelve hours of sleep each day. He may not be taking his daily naps anymore. He might have nightmares, but these bad dreams are normal. Quietly reassure and calm him and then return him to his own bed. A child needs a good night's rest to do well in school.

Now is the time to take your child to the dentist, if you haven't before. Following a complete dental examination, you will want to discuss with your child's dentist tooth loss patterns, foods, fluoride, and flossing. You've probably noticed some loose teeth, and soon your child will begin losing her temporary teeth. You must teach and reinforce good dental habits. Following the advice of your dentist, your child should brush daily, with your four-year-old needing some assistance. Again on dental advice, you may encourage your child to floss daily, with your four-year-old still needing some help from you.

Should I tell my child about drugs?

Starting school is the time when your child will begin to learn about the world outside her home. Although you may think of your four or five-year-old as still being your baby, it's not too early to help her learn to say "no" to alcohol and other drugs.

The best way to begin is by being a good role model. Your own attitude toward alcohol and other drugs will have a strong effect on your child. Talk with your child and make sure he understands the problems alcohol and drugs can cause. But make sure you're also a good listener. You want your child to feel free to share with you any problems or experiences he may have involving drugs or alcohol.

Happy Children — Talking, Toys, Television

Your child will learn better at home and in school if she feels really good about herself. One way to give her self-respect is to listen carefully to what she has to tell you. Another way is to be patient and answer all her questions. Still another way is to give her room to try new things, to make simple decisions, and to explore new situations.

Talking

Your child is eager to talk with you. He is full of new experiences to share and stories to tell. You should make time in your busy schedule to talk with your child and enjoy this quiet time together. Lively conversations can be held during mealtime, but be sure to let your child take part. You want always to talk *with* your child not just *to* him.

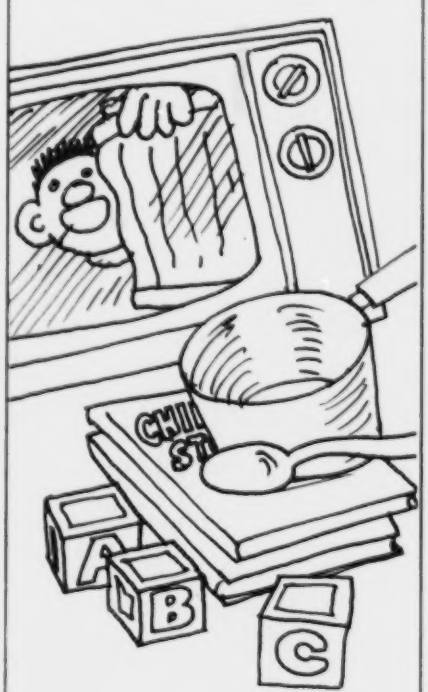
Children who are treated with love and respect grow up feeling important with a sense of "I can do!" Praise works much better than threats in getting your child to do what you want. Telling her "you did a good job" when she does something right makes her want to do it again. It teaches her that she is worthy and helps her be a happy child who grows up to be a happy adult.

Toys

Children can be happy and develop well without a lot of expensive toys. In fact too many toys will confuse your young child. Simple toys from everyday objects you have around the house are often more fun than fancy ones. The best toys let your child use his imagination and creativity instead of telling him what to do. For safety sake, you should choose toys that are right for your child's age.

Television

Television can be fun and help your child learn. It's better for your child when you watch along with her and talk about what you've seen.



Television can also be bad for your child. The programs may be too grown-up for him or they can make him think he can be rude or mean to others. The commercials can make him think he needs lots of expensive toys or needs to use just the right brand names to be happy. None of these messages are good to learn.

Instead of watching lots of television, have your child play alone or with friends. Television viewing should be planned regularly around programs made for children, such as "Mr. Rogers Neighborhood."

Angry Children

Children aren't always happy. Just like you they will sometimes get mad.

You probably know what makes your child mad and the unpleasant ways she can show it, such as fighting, nagging, or breaking things. Some four and five-year-olds are angry when you set limits on their *time* and *actions*, when you ask them to think of others, when they can't tie a shoe or get a coat on, or when someone takes a toy or book away from them.

Because your child is at an age eager to learn, this is a good time to teach him that there are good and bad ways to show anger. The RETHINK skills found on page 31 will help you to work out and talk out anger in a way that solves problems for you as well as your child.

Safe Children

Children aren't always good judges about danger. They get into risky situations because they don't know to be afraid and they want to be independent. Sometimes children get busy and forget to look and listen. Here's a checklist that you should regularly review with your child:

Safety Checklist

- [x] I know how to use 911 for police, fire, or doctors.
- [ ] I know a police officer is my friend and can help me.
- [ ] I refuse money, candy, or gifts from strangers.
- [ ] I always tell my parents where I will be.
- [ ] I can tell or show my name, address, and telephone number when necessary.
- [ ] Adults I know use a special word before I will go with them.
- [ ] I never take rides or talk with strangers.
- [ ] I do not play in empty buildings or alleys.
- [ ] I walk to and from school with the people I'm supposed to.
- [ ] I always get on the same bus unless I have a note signed in the office.
- [ ] My parents and I talk about safe places to go in an emergency or if I am lost or separated from them.
- [ ] I know how to reach my parents at all times.
- [ ] I tell my parents or teacher when someone makes me feel bad.

Motor vehicle accidents, drowning, burns, and poisonings are the most frequent accidents experienced by young children. The following checklist may help protect your child from serious injury.

Motor vehicle

- [ ] I wear my seat belt.
- [ ] I follow the rules my parents taught me when I cross the street.
- [ ] I do not play in the street.

Drowning

- [ ] I stay away from ponds, pools, and lakes unless there is a grown-up there.
- [ ] I am taking or going to take swimming lessons.
- [ ] I wear a life preserver when I'm in a boat.

Burns

- [ ] I do not play with matches.
- [ ] I know how to get out of my house if there is a fire.
- [ ] I do not use the stove by myself.

Poisonings

- [ ] I do not play with medicines.
- [ ] I do not play with cleaning products or even empty cleaning containers.
- [ ] There is a poison control number for "Mr. Yuk" on our telephone.

3 Knowing Our School

Who Will My Child's Teacher Be?

Your child's kindergarten experience will be guided by a trained professional — her teacher — who understands how children learn and just which activities are best for a young child.

Your child's teacher already knows that no two children are alike. Some children are loud and bossy. Some are quiet and shy. Some like being with other children, others prefer being on their own. Some children are very active and take big risks, others are afraid to try new things and want to stay right by their parents' sides.

What your child's teacher may not know and what you need to share are:

- Your child's interest and unique abilities
- Your child's special emotional and physical needs
- Any physical problems that may need attention during school such as allergies, chronic illness, and disabilities
- Stressful situations that may affect your child's learning
- Special days or customs that your family regularly observes

As a parent, you're probably well aware of how children can sometimes be grouchy or stubborn or difficult to handle. Those are natural children's behaviors, and you don't have to worry that your child's teacher won't understand.

What Is the School Program?

The early learning years can be a delightful time for you and your child. Be active in his school life, and his education will be more rewarding to both of you.

Your child's classroom may appear to be different than what you remember from your school days. Instead of only desks lined up in a row, there may be special learning centers around the room that are for activities in art, dramatic play, reading, writing, and math. There may be shelves with blocks, games, and puzzles; a sink and container for sand and water play; and a section with props such as clothes and hats to encourage children's pretend play.

Kindergarten activities vary from school to school and from teacher to teacher. Regardless of which school your child attends, she will have many new experiences and learn many new skills, including:

- Getting along with others
- Exploring new things
- Asking questions and anticipating future events
- Dictating words and stories for the teacher to write down
- Using new words
- Sharing toys, games, and books
- Expressing herself with words, clay, crayon, and music
- Looking at books and learning to use them
- Listening to stories, directions, and others
- Spotting differences in color, size, shape, and sound
- Caring for herself and her belongings
- Following simple rules and taking turns
- Being thoughtful
- Counting by relating numbers to specific groups of objects
- Caring for living things, pets, and plants

A typical teacher's schedule may look something like this:

TODAY'S SCHEDULE — Southwest Elementary School

OPENING ACTIVITIES — Discuss daily routines, read the calendar, discuss the weather, and take attendance.

TOTAL GROUP ACTIVITY — Introduce today's theme and explore children's interest in the topic. Use language, math, science, or social studies as appropriate. (Hope to foster reading skills, build concepts, develop problem-solving skills, and encourage group interaction.)

WORK TIME — Assign children to individual learning centers to develop and reinforce today's topic. Provide a variety of materials and equipment to make sure all children are actively involved.

LANGUAGE ARTS — Offer learning experiences to develop reading, language, and communication skills. Will work on each child's ability to organize and use information, communicate effectively with others, and learn reading skills.

NUTRITION AND QUIET TIME — Todd's turn to serve snack. Encourage low-key conversation.

RECESS — Take class outside to play, weather permitting; otherwise use indoor gym equipment.

MUSIC, ART, AND LITERATURE — Music teacher coming today. Have class make seasonal decorations and write poems for bulletin board. Read Brown Bear, Brown Bear.

Are There Laws about School?

Maryland has several legal requirements dealing with your child's education. Every child is required to have a birth certificate as proof of age and an up-to-date immunization record on file with the school by the first day of school, or she may not be allowed to enroll. In addition, there are laws regarding entrance age and attendance. State law also requires verification of age, immunization against certain diseases, early identification screening, and hearing and vision tests.

Entrance to Kindergarten/First Grade

"Children admitted to the kindergarten program in the public schools shall be at least 5 years old on or before December 31 of the year in which they apply for entrance."

Effective July 1, 1992, children who are five years old by December 31st will be required to attend kindergarten or an alternative program prior to entrance into first grade. An "alternative program" to public school kindergarten is defined as enrollment in a nonpublic kindergarten program in a private school, in a five-year-old program in a licensed child care center, or in a licensed family day care setting. If you believe that your child lacks the maturity to be ready for kindergarten, you may request a waiver for one year by writing to your local superintendent of schools. After the year for which the maturity waiver was granted has passed, your child will still need to attend kindergarten before entering first grade.

Early Admission to First Grade

"A local board of education may adopt an early admission policy that will allow a five-year-old child, upon request of the parent, to be admitted to the first grade. It is the responsibility of the local superintendent or his designee to determine if the child has demonstrated capabilities warranting early admission."

If a local school system uses this rule, your five-year-old may be able to go to first grade. You should check with your local school.

Compulsory Attendance

"Every child in Maryland who is five years old or older and under 16 must be enrolled in school."

Even if you choose to enroll your child in a school at age four, he is expected to attend regularly. When young learners miss school, they miss important chances to learn. Good habits about going to school are established during these early years. Your child's teacher and principal will become very concerned if he is late or absent. If he has to miss school, you should always send a note when he returns, telling why he was absent.

Hearing and Vision Screening Tests

"Every child upon first entrance to school must have hearing and vision screening tests unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested within the past year."

These tests are given free by the local health department to make sure that she can see and hear well. The tests are painless and take only a few minutes. You will be notified that your child is to be tested.

Early Identification and Intervention Program

"Every child entering kindergarten or first grade shall be screened to identify potential learning problems."

This statewide early screening program is conducted to identify strengths and needs of children during kindergarten. It makes it easier for the school to plan the correct type of instruction for each child. The school may also give you suggestions for ways to help your child at home. "Screening" is the first step in planning a successful education for your child. It is not designed to make decisions about your child's grade placement. If you feel that the screening process is being misused, you should consult with your school's principal or your local board of education.

Special education programs are available for children from birth who have a disability that interferes with learning. If your child has a disability or if you think he may have a disability, contact the principal for more information.

Will My Child Be Tested?

Tests are a way for teachers to find out about your child's learning needs. Although most people think of tests as using a pencil and paper, often young children are tested by being listened to and watched. Listening is particularly important because it can be a clue to how your child is thinking about herself and her school and home life. That kind of testing is called "informal assessment." It helps identify your child's growth and progress physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

The other kind of testing is called "formal assessment." Although tests are not a good substitute for watching, they help the school tell if the kindergarten and first grade program are successful. Tests also show your child's strengths and weaknesses. The most common types of tests administered are readiness tests, developmental screening tests, achievement tests, and diagnostic tests.

Both kinds of testing help teachers to be sure that your child is in the class that is best for him. The more the teacher knows about your child, the better his school program will match his interests, strengths, and needs. You should talk about your child with his teachers. They will welcome your questions, respect your concerns, and always tell you how your child is doing.

As a parent, you have the right to know when, how, and why your child is going to be tested. Above all you have the right to find out the test results, what they do or do not mean, and how your child's scores will be used.

4 Finding Before-and-After School Care

You may need to find before-and-after-school care for your child outside your home. It will probably take time to find the right place, so don't wait until the last minute. The following three considerations can help you begin this difficult selection process.

- **The caregiver.**
  Do you trust your "stand-in?" Did you check references?
- **The setting.**
  Is it a comfortable and safe environment for your child? Is the location convenient? Can you arrange to have as few caregivers as possible?
- **The program.**
  Are other children close to your child's age? Are you allowed to participate or observe?

What Types of Care Are Available?

Three basic types of child care meet the varying needs of families.

Family day care: Your child goes to the home of a person registered by the state to care for children.

Center care: Your child is cared for in groups according to her age in a center licensed by the state.

In-home care: An individual comes to your home to care for your child.

How Do I Locate It?

Be creative when looking for dependable child care.

- Check with the school your child will be attending.
- Check with neighbors whose children are in child care programs.
- Check with your church, synagogue, library, or community organization.
- Look for registered providers in both the "position wanted" and "help wanted" ads in the classified section of your newspaper, but be sure to check references.

How Do I Know If It Is Right?

You are facing a difficult decision. Probably for the first time, you're putting your child's care in the hands of another adult. It's typical to be anxious, but the more questions you ask and information you obtain, the easier the process becomes. Use the sample questions below to get ideas for making up an extensive list based on your individual needs.

Child Care Centers

1. How long have you been a licensed child care provider?
2. What are the hours you operate?

3. How much do you charge? Does this include food?

4. Are there fees for late pick-up? Do I pay if my child misses a day?

5. Do you provide transportation to and from school?

6. May I have three references?

Family Day Care

If you choose a family day care, you should ask the same questions as you would for a child care center. In addition you should ask:

1. How long have you been a registered child care provider?

2. How many children do you care for, and how old are they?

3. What do you do if you or my child gets sick?

Also check both family or center care for safety, cleanliness, attractiveness, adequate supervision, and other things important to you. You should watch the caregiver with children: are they happy together, does the caregiver respond to the children, does the way the children are disciplined suit you? You should also pay attention to other adults: are they involved with the child care, do they cause the caregiver to often be away from the children?

In-Home Care

If you hire someone to take care of your child in your home, you must get personal recommendations. You should interview each applicant in person. Some questions to ask include:

1. How old are you?
   NOTE: It is against the law for a child under 13 to care for a child under the age of eight.

2. Have you ever cared for children before? Did you enjoy it? How old were the children?

3. Have you ever taken a baby-sitting or other course about children?

4. Do you know first-aid and CPR?

5. Are you available on school holidays and emergency closings as well as the agreed-on hours?

6. Do you offer transportation?

When hiring someone to take care of your child in your home, you must have very specific rules. The employee should know how much television your child may watch and what shows. Is your child allowed to have friends come in the house, or is he allowed to visit friends in their homes? Must homework be finished before playing or do you plan to help your child at night? Are there special rules for outdoor play — climbing trees, riding bikes, roller skating? Are there special rules for in-house behavior — running, bouncing on beds, cleaning up? Also, keep a list of emergency telephone numbers, including where you will be, a neighbor or friend, and the child's doctor or clinic.

I've Decided, Now What?

Whatever type of care you select, it is important to have a written agreement that spells out the services you want. Even though you have a signed agreement, if either you or your child becomes unhappy with the care, you must immediately look into the problem. First, talk to the child care provider, but if you are still concerned, do not hesitate to contact the proper officials, including social services, health department, or police. Under no circumstances should you ignore your child's complaints; but neither should you overreact.

If you can't afford child care or are having a hard time paying for it, your local department of social services may be able to help.

5 My Role In My Child's Education

Communication — A Two-Way Street with the School

You and your child's teacher share in the job of making her school experience a good one. A good relationship between parent and teachers comes from talking together and keeping in touch with each other. The best kind of communication is honest and open and flows back and forth. Remember that your child may be behaving very differently at school than you expect. Try to listen with an open mind.

The easiest way to reassure yourself about how your child will do is to call and share your concerns with his teacher. Usually, communication between teachers and parents is informal. Since teachers are busy with children during school hours, it's often best to call and leave a message with the school's office.

In addition to informal conversations and visits, your child's school will use a variety of other ways to keep in touch with you. They include:

Newsletters — School and class newsletters usually include information about school events and articles on school news.

Wall Calendars — Some schools use attractive wall calendars to let you know about school holidays, inservice days, and special events.

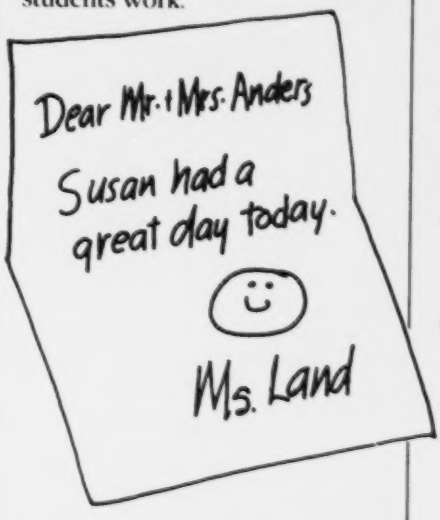
Parent-Teacher Conferences — School staff will make every effort to find a time to meet with you. Conferences give you an excellent chance to find out how your child is doing in school.

Informal Drop-In Hours/ Discussion Sessions — Frequently principals, and sometimes teachers, have special hours for parents to visit without an appointment. In addition, informal coffee hours are sometimes held with small groups of parents who are invited to share their feelings about the school.

Home Visits — Some schools have their principal, teachers, staff, or other parents make home visits to talk about the school and encourage you to participate in school activities.

Student Progress Reports — Teachers send you regular reports about your child's progress in school. There is usually a space for you to respond.

Open House — The school staff is proud of its school and students and wants to show them off. Open house lets the staff do this and lets you meet other parents and teachers and watch students work.



What Activities Will Help My Child Succeed?

Don't forget that every child is different. Your friend's daughter may learn to count faster than your son. Or your neighbor's four-year-old may read better than your five-year-old. Don't pressure your child to read or count or write or spell or do any other school work before she is ready. The following list is suggested ways you can help your child prepare for learning:

- Read with your child every day. Let your child "read" back to you. A child who is learning to read needs to hear how reading sounds. Praise him often.
- Involve your child in simple chores: straightening up his room, setting the table, getting the mail, sorting food items.
- Give your child tasks to do with you: helping in the kitchen, working on a project. When your child works nearby, you can encourage good work habits.
- Have your child clip coupons from magazines and newspapers.
- Let your child pretend to help you pay bills using play money made out of paper.
- Make place mats for special occasions by decorating with old greeting cards or birthday cards.

- Include a note from your child in a letter to a relative or a friend.
- Involve your child in planning and cooking family meals.
- Watch television together and ask your child to predict what will happen next in the story.
- Emphasize the child's being responsible for himself. Teach him to dress himself, put away his clothes, clean up his toys.
- Go with your child to the library and check out picture books and story books.
- Let your child dictate stories for you to print in big letters.

Sharing learning with your child can be fun! And it can help to strengthen your ties to each other. Here are some learning activities to share with your child while shopping and traveling.

While Shopping

- Let your child count change for vending machines and simple purchases.
- Let your child make her version of your grocery list, even if the letters don't seem to make sense to you.
- Plan a shopping trip with some money for her to spend as she wishes.
- Read labels and signs to find aisles and departments in grocery and department stores.
- Let your child point out products the family usually buys.
- Emphasize helpfulness and courtesy as you wait in line to check out.
- Ask your child to notice all the people who work in the store and the many jobs they do.
- Give your child limited choices about purchases of cereal, snacks, or other items as special treats.
- Select a time to shop when you and your child can enjoy being together.

While Traveling

- Let your child have his own small suitcase for his special things.
- Let your child point out traffic signs and what they mean.
- Point out familiar logos on billboards and have your child read them. Example: Coca-Cola, Ford
- Sing some songs you knew as a child and let your child teach you some from his school.
- Be creative in planning games and activities to amuse your child for the entire trip.
- Play counting games and color games with passing cars.
- Compliment your child for good behavior; tell him why you enjoy traveling with him; for example, his interesting stories and pleasant company.

APPENDIX:

And Especially for You — the Parent

Actions

Actions for Good Parenting

Trust Your common sense and your own abilities. Expect to take an important role in your child's education. Everyone recognizes that you are your child's most important teacher.

Know That education starts as soon as your child is born. So take advantage of those early years. Enjoy teaching your child and watching her learn.

Give Your child things to do at home that he can do. Successful experiences help your child to feel and say, "See what I can do!"

Build Self-confidence in your child by letting her know you need her, that she is important to you and your family. Everyone — even the youngest members of the family — needs to be needed.

Relax Knowing that you don't have to be perfect to teach your child. One bad day or even one bad year will not stop or spoil your child's growth, abilities, or imagination.

Assume That when your child enters public school, his teacher will welcome him, will ask your advice, and will use your abilities as a parent. If this doesn't happen, talk to the teacher and go to the school frequently. Sitting at home worrying won't help your child.

Start To praise your school. Find something nice to say about the school or teacher, even if you're having a problem. This will help your child feel that school is a positive place to be.

Listen To your child. You will find out what she knows and what she thinks about the things she has done.

Support Your child's teacher when you can. Discuss problems directly with the teacher.

Criticize Constructively When you have a concern. You should ask questions, speak up at conferences and meetings, and don't ever be ashamed of being "just" a parent.

Rethink

Rethink Anger — Yours and Your Child's

Anger that is destructive can lead to health and school problems. The RETHINK chart below can introduce you to skills that will help you and your child deal with anger in a constructive manner.

R Recognize your anger and your child's anger. What is your child doing that makes you angry? Why do you think your child is angry? What happened?

E Empathize with your child. 'Walk' in her shoes. Help your child tell you what is making her angry, using 'I' statements such as, "I can tell you are angry when I make you eat stuff you don't like."

You use 'I' statements, too. "I am angry, too. I worked especially hard to make this dinner and then you refuse to eat it." Teach your child to 'walk' in your shoes.

T Think. The way you think will determine your anger or reduce it. What are you thinking when your child makes you angry? "This child does not appreciate how much I do at home and at work."

You can change your thinking. "I really can't expect my child to understand my problems. How can I help her to deal with her anger in constructive ways? She is trying to grow up and become more independent. Good for her!"

You can think of other ways to deal with anger, "What else can I do!"

H Hear what your child is saying. Try eye contact. Repeat what you are hearing to check how well you understand what your child is saying, what feeling he is having.

You can teach your child to hear, too, just by setting an example.

I Integrate or combine respect and love with your expression of anger. "I love you, honey, but I feel very unhappy when you don't put your toys away. Let's work together on this."

You can teach your child to integrate love and respect with his anger, too. "Hey don't say you hate me, that hurts, because I love you. Tell me what is bothering you."

N Notice your body's reactions as you get angry. What happens to it? Notice what calms your body down. What works for you?

Help your child notice his body cues to anger. Talk about what cools you down and help him find ways to calm himself down.

K Keep your attention on what is making you angry now. Don't bring up old problems. Don't remind your child about what he did last week that made you angry. Focus on the present.

Help your child focus on the present, too. Don't accept "You never let me… You are always…" Have him tell you what is making him angry now.

State of Maryland
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Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Instruction
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